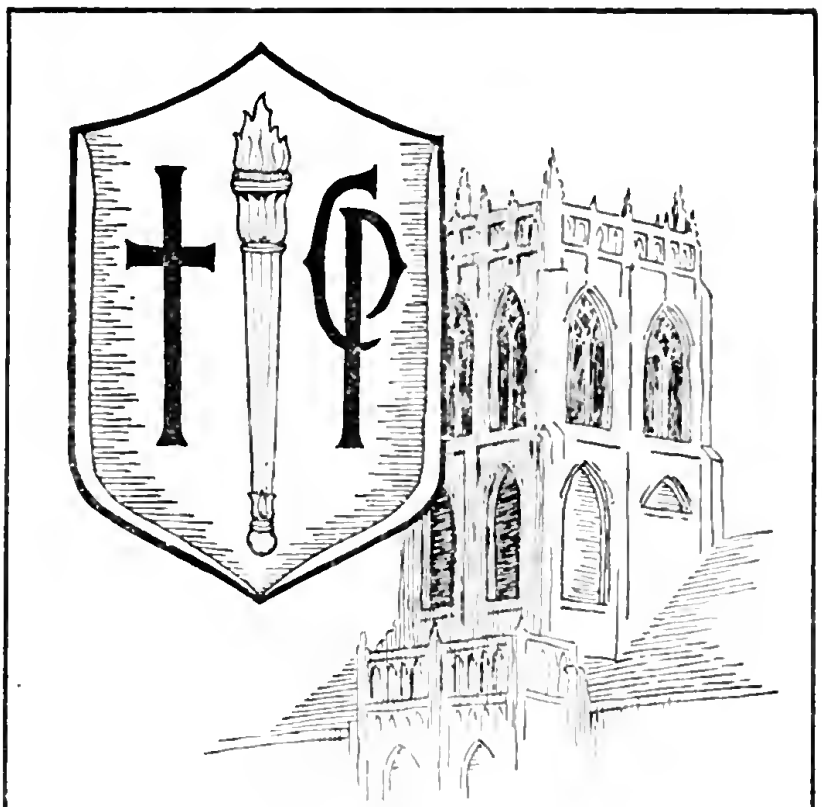

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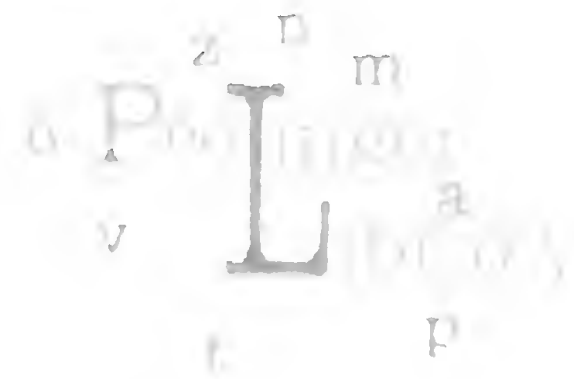

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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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SWINBURNE

BY

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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I

Algernon Charles Swinburne, sprung of the strength of English blood, was born in London, April 5, 1837, the eldest son of Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne, and Lady Jane Henrietta, daughter of the third earl of Ashburnham. His childhood was summered in Northumberland and wintered in the Isle of Wight, so that the ancestry of his senses as well as of his blood was of the sea. He was bred at Eton and Oxford, where though not undistinguished in scholarship he took no degree. He became acquainted with Italy and France

by travel. From his boyhood and in college days he was devoted to the literary life, and thereafter literature was his sole career. A life secluded in friendships and studies has been his portion, as a man; and the fruits of it, by which he lives to the public, are an abundance of prose and verse which has come forth unintermittently for nearly forty years; he stands now alone, the last of the great English poets of the nineteenth century, with a fame never to be forgotten in the annals of that time thronged though it be with poetic names and voices of matchless splendor and music.

II

The gift of Swinburne is to be capable of passion. Enthusiasm is inseparable from

him. Perhaps the simplest aspect of his genius lies in his revolutionary songs. The old French fire burns its last in his torch. It is the flame that descended for an hour upon Coleridge, that wrapped Shelley life-long and in death, that by tradition now belongs to the English race of poets from Milton to Landor with every well-loved name to aid; and in his generation Swinburne will ever be remembered as its herald, a figure sole and supereminent, the poet-republican

"I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion
Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath,"—

that is his attitude, in the modern battle for liberty, like Taillefer at Hastings. It began with his songs for Italy, in the great days of her patriots, the first-fruits of his

sympathies with the land and of his personal admiration for Mazzini. He does not state the grounds of his faith, for it is not an intellectual passion that seizes on him; it is a fervour that burns, an exaltation that lifts and heightens, a flood of feeling that pours forth and inundates with light and music and with the confluence of many strengths in one superb moral force — the revolutionary cause. Its monotone, though in part due to the quality of the resonance and to the sameness of the imagery, is essentially emotional, the monotone of profound and unchangeable depth in the feeling itself which is a constituent of the eternal nature of man. The passion is a capacity to hate as well as to love. There is no such master of the curse, in modern days. He

strikes home and to the pit with it, and with a mien and phrase and a volleying after of fire and wrath fit to hurl Satan down to the abyss. These are curses to rejoice the heart. They mark their victims indelibly for hell. *Vice versa* his hymns to Landor, Victor Hugo and Mazzini are adorations. These three were the living hands that had fed him in youth with their touch, their words, their presence on earth. The fire they nursed though they did not kindle, had long life in it, a deep core of heat; and whether the year was '66 or yesterday, whether the scene was Rome or Paris, Crete or Muscovy, the poet still brooded there the passion-bolts of his invective or pæans for victor and martyr. In his own land Swin-

burne's revolutionary ardour changed and took a new form in an illimitable patriotism, a pride in England, an Elizabethan might of land-love that carried the fate of the Armada in its bosom as its dearest memory and expressed itself in an exuberance of panegyric and delight that makes his verse seem contemporaneous with English liberty and the ocean-rhythm of England's empire. This love of liberty and dedication to mankind had, too, its far fount, under dark centuries, in Athens,

"*Dear city of men without master or lord;*"

thence the poet had drank, most truly, the draught of his inspiration, the intoxication of his faith in man. The stream of his revolutionary song is unmatched in vol-

ume, splendour and force; it has flowed life-long, and still wells; it is blended of many loves of persons and histories and memories, of time and of eternity; it is a great passion, great in personal intensity, great in its human outreaching and uplifting aspiration, great in sincerity. Here is immense manhood-strength, seeking, by the poet's right, to pour itself through the impoverished veins of miserable men."

III

Even in so brief an opening glance at Swinburne's work the fact of his scholarship, his provenience from literature, stands prominently forth. I suppose that no English poet has ever had so wide and familiar acquaintance with the poetry of

foreign climes. He began with a felicitous command of the classical and romance languages. He took the Taylorian prize, in his college days, for French and Italian, and won other similar distinction in the ancient tongues. He has written, as a poet, in Greek, Latin and French with literary mastery. In English his studies have been prolonged and comprehensive, and not restricted to poetry. Out of this varied scholarship sprang his prose works, a long series beginning with his elaborate exposition of Blake's genius and including for its bulk an examination of the Elizabethan drama, together with the study of Victor Hugo. To be grouped here, also, as dependent on the critical activity of his mind are the poems so many in number which,

whether in the form of ode, elegy or sonnet, are dedicated to the literary fame of those writers whom he had deeply studied. In this large body of verse his criticism is condensed and, so far as the matter permits, is put into the form of poetry with a full heart of praise. He indulges himself in this luxury of praise, in a minute and lavish tribute to the writers of many books and plays, to the nameless as well as the famous dead. Swinburne truly is nowhere more the poet than in this inexhaustible capacity to be moved to hero-worship and the affectionate eulogy of those who from Sappho and Catullus down the long line seem to be in the intimacy of genius his own. His criticism is woven of such noble recognitions.

This literary element, explicitly exposed in his prose criticism and in the critical as distinguished as from the imaginative portions of his verse, is implicitly active in the whole mass of his poetry. Its influence is observed most plainly in the structural form of his dramas. He had achieved such familiarity with past literature that his mind became capable of an attitude of contemporaneity toward it; he was thus led, in opposition to the usual attempt of a literary poet to modernize what he derives from the past and naturalize it in his own age, rather to archaize his own forms. Swinburne's detachment from his own time was gradual, but he moved toward a reproduction of both the Greek and the English antique. "Atalanta in Calydon"

was his first experiment in this way, but "Erechtheus," his second Greek play, was more perfect in the success that it aimed at. Similarly his earliest dramatic work "The Queen Mother" and "Rosamond," though Shaksperian in diction and reminiscence, was yet not a conscious reversion in art; but the play of "Locrine," and the trilogy of "Chastelard," "Bothwell" and "Mary Stuart," a chronicle history as he himself describes it, were attempts to write anew in the Elizabethan manner of the drama. The same may be said of "Marino Faliero," while "The Sisters" and "Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards," the other two dramas, stand somewhat apart.

In the trilogy of which Queen Mary is the theme, the effort for contemporaneity

with the past is also to be observed, other than artistically, in the historical veracity of the characters in themselves and of the scene of events. Attentive and exhaustive study of the facts of the record is noticeable, the historian's fidelity; and it is rather in obedience to the necessities of history than of art that the poet has swelled and lengthened the drama to such a remarkable compass, and owns that the work has such proportions and has been so treated as to deserve the name of an epic drama. He seems desirous that it should be judged of as a history as well as in its aspect as a work of imagination. This indicates the depth in him of that feeling for past fact, which has controlled the artistic form of the drama in his general use,

both Greek and English. He disengages himself from contemporary realities — standards, ideas, convictions — but subjects himself to the realities of another place and time so far as he can re-embody them; he thus by native aptitude and with the aid of scholarship, does become in a singular degree a citizen and freeman of many literatures and at their different periods, a poet in whom what would be imitation and reminiscence in others becomes genuine because he plays the part he assumes after due study and with deep feeling; he thus succeeds beyond all others in writing literary drama that accords with past principles of composition.

Such a power to free oneself from one's own age and move in the guise and fash-

ion of other times and places, illustrated here by the use Swinburne makes of the drama, involves aloofness from the world. He is, in fact, in his greater work of the imagination, remote from current life. He lives, withdrawn in his own thoughts, in that sphere of the poetic imagination where there is a true timelessness, — the solitude thronged with figures that appear at any moment from any age and drift across the vision or play their mimic parts before the mind's eye and disappear. It is the world of the great artists. Locrine, Erechtheus, Meleager are natural there; so are the stormy passion of the Scotch peers, the craft of English statesmen, the spectacle of Venetian pride; or Sappho or Faustine. The world of Swinburne is well

symbolized by that Zodiac of the burning signs of love that he named in the prelude to "Tristram of Lyonesse," — the signs of Helen, Hero, Alcyone, Iseult, Rosamond, Dido, Juliet, Cleopatra, Francesca, Thisbe, Angelica, Guenevere; under the heavens of these starry names the poet moves in his place apart and sees his visions of woe and wrath and weaves his dream of the loves and the fates of men. He is a myth-lover, a dreamer, a companion of the myths and the dreams of the past, an artist of the imagination. The aloofness that belongs to Swinburne's verse is not due only to his effort to archaize the forms of his art, but much more to the fact that he reverts to great imaginative themes which, in themselves, are

remote from the modern world, and conceives them in a spirit of poetry that now seems to have its death-limit of a great age in his sole surviving genius.

The artistic conservatism of Swinburne, which disposed him in the rigidity of his mind to the preservation and choice of anterior poetic forms, and to the treatment of antique and legendary themes or subjects of historic grandeur, is also felt in his desire that these themes should be kept in their primitive state. He revolted against moderization of the old in all its forms. The dramatic bent of his own genius may have predisposed him against idyllic treatment by any transforming method; but, apart from that, there was, deep in his nature, a rooted abhorrence of any change in

the essentials of the antique or mediæval matter, a feeling reflected in his care for the accuracy of history in his trilogy. He was a purist, in opposition to his contemporaries. This was exemplified, for the Arthur Myth, in "The Tale of Balen," and again in "Tristram of Lyonesse;" he stood for the mediæval, romantic narrative in the one case, and for the naked majesty of primitive love and fate in the other. There is a truthfulness, an austerity of truth, in all this which is temperamental in the poet and marks the strength of his individuality. In a certain way there is the spirit of Pre-Raphælitism in it, a formal reversion to severer artistic methods, to a primitive poetry, to a more stern and bare figure of life, a reversion to art as

opposed to mere manipulation of material, a recognition of the truth that the great themes of imagination are given to man, not created by him in any passing generation, that they are of man but not of men. This reverence of Swinburne for the past, in form and matter, in the things of art, is a part of that ritual of hero-worship to which he gives such fervid and personal expression and which is summed generally throughout his verse in his ever recurring hymn to Apollo, to the Sun-god, the inspiration of all poetry. The poet's faith is in this past of art, both form and matter and personality, instrument and theme and singer, and he sustains it against the temporal hour by virtue of his own enfranchisement in the mind from

time, of his own liberty in the mastery of many literatures and epochs, of his own contemporaneity with poetry in a multitude of its forms and moods. Swinburne's conservatism is one with his hero-worship, one with his scholarship, one with his life-long passion for literature, a poet's passion for life in the imaginative world. The love of literature, a scholar's love, is the most fundamental thing in him; it is a jealous and deep-hearted love and controls him in his theories as well as in his practice, in his mental outlook as well as in his secret inspiration; it may make him aloof in person, remote in theme, reversionary in art, but it gives him a wide domain. The revolutionary cause even was for him a literary heirloom from the poets. Swinburne

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

is a poet of culture through whom flows the broad stream of the many thoughts of men.

IV

Swinburne first took the world with melody. The opening chorus of "Atalanta in Calydon" was, in the ears of men, a new singing voice on earth. Its music stamps the memory of whoever hears it beyond any possible oblivion. The cadence and the phrase are both characteristic of the poet's original genius, and so is their inseparability; they are one in the manifold of their syllables and they flash out in their fall what can only be called a colour of sound. This is the peculiar and arresting poetic gift of Swinburne, the lyrical iridescence of the verse like a mother-of-

pearl sea, like a green wave breaking in tempest, like a rainbow-spray before the beak of his driving song; it is a marvel that changes but fails not, a witchery of language, a vocal incantation in the rhymes, an enchantment in the mere pour of sound and pause and elision,— a purely metrical gift. The chorus of the "Atalanta" serves melodically as a prelude to all this lyrical change, just as it arises most spontaneously in the memory, in the recall of his music.

"When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,

For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofèd heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Mœnad and the Bassarid;

And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the tree divide,
And screen from seeing the leave in sight
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening into sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies."

The lyrical vein here opened disclosed richer ores in the succeeding choruses and antiphonal arrangements of the plays. A new master of song-craft was plain to see. But there was that in the Hellenism of this play which gave the quality of an exotic to the verse, which shadowed and

veiled the permanence of the gift and made it appear more magical than real. Its reality and permanence as the natural gift of an English poet was first and surprisingly established in men's minds by the publication of the first series of "Poems and Ballads" from which Swinburne's fame properly began. Here the lyrical quality was pre-eminent, greater in range and variety and in effect than in any later volume; here, there, were not only the cadence and the phrase, the flow, the colour of sound, the intermingling of musical senses with the whole range of emotion and thought, but such delicacy and litheness and volume in the verses as made them a new revelation of language as a medium of expression. It was as if a

new magical art had arisen, and Swinburne was its master. The verse was like sword-play, for brilliancy and precision, for short and long, for speed and glitter and nerve. Familiarity with it has now lessened the pleasures of surprise and wonder; but as the poet has gone on through later years, and from time to time has put forth his strength in novel ways, he has maintained and increased his early fame as a metrical master perfecting a native gift with all the resources of an exact and subtle scholarship in the resources of his art, its aims and limits, as a form of music in words. In all these things he is accomplished.

Perfect, however, in metres, he is less sensitive to purity in structural form. His

lyrics are apt to be shortened dramas, his dramas to be fragmentary epics, his narrative to be a blend of lyric passion and dramatic episode. "Tristram of Lyonesse" is his most characteristic poem in this respect as in all others; it is the poem most representative of his qualities, each at its best. The poet's command of intellectual form, of the proportion of matter to expression, of the economic rendering of character, event and thought, of that logical condensation which is effected by art, is less manifest. Form in all its modes, and they are numerous, is essential to the greatest poetry. Swinburne is eminent for metrical form, in the highest degree; and in this he is lyrically unrivalled, so far as the form only is concerned. Of form in its

structural and intellectual modes he has less, but prefers complexity to singleness and an ample fullness to economy. Blank verse also does not take his imprint so sympathetically as the lyrical measures, though as studiously laboured as his rhymed and lyric lines; it is rather by the melody with which he first captured men, and by no other equal bond, that he holds the world under the fascination of liquid cadences and light lilts and choral harmonies that first fell on human speech from his lips.

V

The second salient trait of Swinburne's work, and one not less impressive and individualistic than his lyricism, is its rendering of the experience of passion. The

theme is most pervasive in his earlier verse, and is there so frequent and takes on so many forms of imagination that a misleading idea was fixed in the public mind of the narrowness of his range in poetry. The poetic fiction under which he develops the theme is multifold, and exhibits the various sources of his culture; it has three main phases, classical, mediæval and Pre-Raphælite. The guise of Pre-Raphælitism is the earliest and most palpable in the verse, and the fact is connected with the poet's association in life with the group of artists, Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones and others, with whom he had come in contact in college days and later, and to whose art in painting and cast of imagination generally Swinburne's

was most cognate. His mind formed the habit of allegorizing in human figures abstractions, such as Love, Fear, Grief, and presenting these pictorially and symbolically. They are figures essentially without the motion of life, designated by attributes of colour and wreath and wand, canvases or cameos in words; the poems in which they are the human element of interest are also highly conventionalized in their literary art, generally under French or Italian influences. Such are the opening poems of his work, set first in the collected edition, "A Ballad of Life" and "A Ballad of Death." The initial note thus struck often recurs, but as an artistic method it is diminishingly employed by the poet in the progress of his works. The classical

source of his song is a much deeper spring, and from the moment when it blends with the verse lifts it far away from æstheticism, conventionalized art and any limitation of narrow modes, peculiar fashion and formalism. The theme at once takes its great form as that of the everlasting opposition in human nature which is historically summed up as the antithesis of classical paganism to monkish Christianity, or more broadly as the contrast of the bodily with the spiritual element in life. Swinburne still farther defines the discord as the opposition of the worship of Venus to that of the Virgin Mary; and thus begins for him that denial of Christian symbolism which he carried to the extreme of expression in the poem "Before a Crucifix."

The reversionary instinct, so noticeable in all his art, is here at work unchecked. He seems, like another Julian, to bring back the worship of the Greek divinities, affirming their permanence essentially in human nature, and he takes the traditionary dying words of Julian as the motto, one may add the motif, of the poem in which he most eloquently set forth his new paganism, the Hymn to Proserpine:

"O Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day!
From your wrath is the world released, redeemed from your chains, men say.
New Gods are crowned in the city; their flowers have broken your rods;
They are merciful, clothed with pity, the young compassionate Gods.

But for me their new device is barren, the days
are bare ;
Things long past over suffice, and men forgotten
that were.
Time and the Gods are at strife ; ye dwell in the
midst thereof,
Draining a little life from the barren breasts of
love.
I say to you, cease, take rest ; yea, I say to you
all, be at peace,
Till the bitter milk of her breast and the barren
bosom shall cease.
Wilt thou yet take all, Galilean ? but these thou
shalt not take,
The laurel, the palms and the paean, the breasts
of the nymphs in the brake ;
Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with
tenderer breath ;
And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy
before death ;
All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre,

Dropped and deep in the flowers, with strings
that flicker like fire.
More than these wilt thou give, things fairer
than all these things?
Nay, for a little we live, and life hath mutable wings.
A little while and we die; shall life not thrive as
it may?
For no man under the sky lives twice, outliving
his day.
And grief is a grievous thing, and a man hath
enough of his tears:
Why should he labour, and bring fresh grief to
blacken his years?
Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world
has grown grey from thy breath;
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on
the fulness of death.
Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for
a day;
But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel
outlives not May.

Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world is
not sweet in the end;
For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new years
ruin and rend.
Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock
that abides;
But her ears are vexed with the roar and her
face with the foam of the tides.
O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings
of racks and rods!
O ghastly stories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods
Though all men abase them before you in spirit,
and all knees bend,
I kneel not neither adore you, but standing, look
to the end.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Though the feet of thine high priests tread where
thy lords and our forefathers trod,
Though these that were Gods are dead, and thou
being dead art a God,

Though before thee the throned Cytherean be
fallen, and hidden her head,
Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead
shall go down to thee dead.
Of the maiden thy mother men sing as a goddess
with grace clad around;
Thou art throned where another was king;
where another was queen she is crowned.
Yea, once we had sight of another: but now she
is queen, say these.
Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blos-
som of flowering seas,
Clothed round with the world's desire as with
raiment as fair as the foam,
And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess and
mother of Rome.
For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to
sorrow; but ours,
Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and
colour of flowers,

White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a flame,
Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew sweet with her name.
For thine came weeping, a slave among slaves, and rejected; but she
Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial, her foot on the sea.
And the wonderful waters knew her, the winds and the viewless ways,
And the roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue stream of the bays."

The essential elements of Swinburne's imagination and method are all here present in this delineation of opposed divinities each powerful over human life. The identical theme is set forth again under the guise of mediæval fiction in the poem "Laus Veneris," where the knight of the

Venusberg legend sets in antithesis the pagan and the Christian scheme of life, and embodies in himself the apostacy from Christian ideals —

"*For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight,—*"

and his adhesion to the lady of the myth;

"*For till the thunder in the trumpet be,*
Soul may divide from body, but not we
One from another; I hold thee with my hand,
I let mine eyes have all their will of thee."

Apart from the theory and the imagery, these poems are also identical in the tone of sad, dark farewell which converts each of them into a lament for love, for life itself. The protagonist of either poem has finished with life. Both poems have the motion of life, a vital breath in their lyrical

expression of emotion profoundly modified by thought; but about the imagery, the figures of Aphrodite, the Virgin, the Lady of the Venusberg, and also the Crucifix that defines the conception of Christ in "Laus Veneris," — about all these there lingers the Pre-Raphælite habit of imagination; the imagery has more affinity with modes of sacerdotal art, with symbolism and the attributive in imaginative power than it has with the free vitality that is more properly the sphere of poetry.

The new paganism, of which these two poems are elemental expressions receives a widely varied illustration in the body of poetry that is grouped about them. Several of these are dramatic lyrics containing a

situation or a slight story; others are hardly more than exercises in verse, often in French forms; still others are deeply meditated or elaborately studied after the sentiment, the phrasing and the thought-movement of the Greek antique. The whole spirit, however, is romantic in mood and conduct and more nigh to the essentially mediæval than to the modern or to the ancient. The dominant memories of Swinburne, however, whether intellectual or imaginative, lie in classical antiquity; and, so far as he has need of any divine principle in his verse, in concrete forms, he has found approach to the Greek gods most facile. He achieves the most genuine appearance of belief in the gods that has fallen to the fortune of any Eng-

lish poet, perhaps of any poet in any modern literature. The recurring hymn to the Sun, under its many forms, which has already been alluded to, is a deep note of his temperament. The classical immersion of his mind had made clean work of all Christian symbolism; it had swept it away; and in its place came, for imaginative purposes, the Greek forms of old divinity and myth, but less as idols of hope than idols of memory. The close of the "Hymn to Proserpine" gives his point of faith with most precision; death is the end of all, but he chooses for his companions in death the dead gods, — he will descend to Proserpine where all have gone. His faith is a farewell; a *Vale* not an *Ave*.

The new paganism in which imaginative reminiscence plays so great a part, effecting this renascence of antique symbolism in the poet's mind, also finds expression in a more direct and concrete presentation of the experience as well as of the theory of passion, both in the form of dramatic incident or situation and in the form of allegorized figuration in art. Whether set forth under a classical or later name, Sappho or Faustine or Félise, or in the namelessness of a dream of passion, Swinburne delineates the moment with vividness of sensation, with languid hazes, with lights and shadows as of some Venetian picture; or in his symbolical poems he builds up a figure, a background, a landscape as of some mythic painting,

though using mainly cadence as his means of evoking it. "Dolores" is a poem of this last type, and characteristic of his genius, in subject, handling and tone. In all these poems which, in various ways, by dramatic, lyric and meditative modes, set forth the theme of the mortal ways of desire, the accompaniment of the verse is a lament, seldom light, usually profound and often touched with bitterness. Pain is the master-emotion in the verse, unconcealed, rebellious, self-pitying. The knight of the "Laus Veneris" is filled full of it; so are the cadences of "Dolores;" so are some of the lightest and most delicate of the lyrics.

The poem which sets forth this aspect of the paganism of a modern spirit

with nobleness of feeling is "Hesperia," which after its fine nature-opening, goes on with its human burden in these lines:

"From the bountiful infinite west, from the happy memorial plaees
Full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the dead,
Where the fortunate islands are lit with the light of ineffable faces,
And the sound of a sea without wind is about them, and sunset is red,
Come back to redeem and release me from love that recalls and represses,
That cleaves to my flesh as a flame, till the serpent has eaten his fill;
From the bitter delights of the dark, and the feverish, the furtive caresses
That murder the youth in a man or ever his heart have its will.

Thy lips cannot laugh and thine eyes cannot weep; thou art pale as a rose is,
Paler and sweeter than leaves that cover the blush of the bud;
And the heart of the flower is compassion, and pity the core it encloses,
Pity, not love, that is born of the breath and decays with the blood.
As the cross that a wild nun clasps till the edge of it bruises her bosom,
So love wounds as we grasp it, and blackens and burns as a flame;
I have loved overmuch in my life; when the live bud bursts with the blossom,
Bitter as ashes or tears is the fruit, and the wine thereof shame.
As a heart that its anguish divides is the green bud cloven asunder;
As the blood of a man self-slain is the flush of the leaves that allure;

And the perfume as poison and wine to the brain,
a delight and a wonder ;
And the thorns are too sharp for a boy, too slight
for a man to endure,
Too soon did I love it, and lost love's rose ; and
I cared not for glory's ;
Only the blossoms of sleep and of pleasure were
mixed in my hair.
Was it myrtle or poppy thy garland was woven
with, O my Dolores ?
Was it pallor of slumber, or blush as of blood,
that I found in thee fair ?
For desire is a respite from love, and the flesh
not the heart is her fuel ;
She was sweet to me once, who am fled
and escaped from the range of her
reign ;
Who behold as of old time at hand as I turn,
with her mouth growing cruel,
And flushed as with wine with the blood of her
lovers, Our Lady of Pain.

Low down where the thicket is thicker with thorns
than with leaves in the summer,
In the brake is a gleaming of eyes and a hissing
of tongues that I knew ;
And the lithe long throats of her snakes reach
round her, their mouths overcome her,
And her lips grow cool with their foam, made
moist as a desert with dew.
With the thirst and the hunger of lust though
her beautiful lips be so bitter,
With the cold foul foam of the snakes they soften
and redden and smile ;
And her fierce mouth sweetens, her eyes wax
wide and her eyelashes glitter,
And she laughs with a savour of blood in her
face, and a savour of guile.
She laughs, and her hands reach hither, her hair
blows hither and hisses,
As a lowlit flame in a wind, back-blown till it
shudder and leap ;

Let her lips not again lay hold on my soul, nor
her poisonous kisses,
To consume it alive and divide from thy bosom,
Our Lady of Sleep.
Ah daughter of sunset and slumber, if now it
return into prison,
Who shall redeem it anew? But we, if thou wilt,
let us fly;
Let us take to us, now that the white skies thrill
with a moon unarisen,
Swift horses of fear or of love, take flight and
depart and not die.
They are swifter than dreams, they are stronger
than death; there is none that hath rid-
den,
None that shall ride in the dim strange ways of
his life as we ride;
By the meadows of memory, the highlands of hope,
and the shore that is hidden,
Where life breaks loud and unseen, a sonorous
invisible tide;

By the sands where sorrow has trodden, the salt
pools bitter and sterile,
By the thundering reef and the low sea-wall and
the channel of years,
Our wild steeds press on the night, strain hard
through pleasure and peril,
Labour and listen and pant not or pause for the
peril that nears ;
And the sound of them trampling the way
cleaves night as an arrow asunder,
And slow by the sand-hill and swift by the
down with its glimpses of grass,
Sudden and steady the music, as eight hoofs
trample and thunder,
Rings in the ear of the low blind wind of the
night as we pass ;
Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that
was mute as a maiden,
Stung into storm by the speed of our passage,
and deaf where we past ;

And our spirits too burn as we bound, thine holy
but mine heavy-laden,
As we burn with the fire of our flight; ah love,
shall we win at the last?"

The procession of Swinburne's studies of passion, highly composite in artistic material and method as they are and diversified by their kinship with many moods and periods of the spirit of poetry, have, together with their vividness of sensation and their sad meditative burden of the emptiness of mortal things, a monotone that is unmistakable, as omnipresent and profound as the monotone in his revolutionary verses. It is the monotone of fundamental emotion in the one as in the other, and springs from a depth of habitual feeling that is a part of the poet's tem-

perament. The experience of passion is not seized dramatically in the true sense, it is seized lyrically, and the ultimate mood is that of the weariness of life which in place of a dramatic exhaustion of the action in tragic catastrophe, issues only in an exhausted emotion; it belongs to the type that it should end in weakness. The end of the feeling is a transformation into thought; into meditation; in this intellectual climax the mood takes on the appearance of philosophy, of a surrender of life to death, of the prayer to Proserpine before the descent of the poet to the shades of the under-world. This philosophy in which the lyrical mood of Swinburne under these impulses evaporates is most beautifully and winningly given in

the verses so well known by their melody alone, "The Garden of Proserpine." They contain the summary of his verse of life-experience for the individual, of emotional experience properly, and are the death-song of the pagan ideal, not in its historic but its æsthetic sense, as it was conceived and presented by him:

"Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
And men that laugh and weep,

Of what may come hereafter
For men that sow to reap:
I am weary of days and hours,
Blown buds of barren flowers,
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,
Weak ships and spirits steer;
They drive adrift, and whither
They wot not who make thither;
But no such winds blow hither;
And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather-flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes
Where no leaf blooms or blushes

Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
In fruitless fields of corn,
They bow themselves and slumber
All night till light is born ;
And like a soul belated,
In hell and heaven unmated,
By cloud and mist abated
Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,
He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell ;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes ;
And well though love reposes,
In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
Crowned with calm leaves, she stands

Who gathers all things mortal
With cold immortal hands;
Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her
To men that mix and meet her
From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
She waits for all men born;
Forgets the earth her mother,
The life of fruits and corn;
And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow
Where summer song rings hollow
And flowers are put to scorn.

There go the loves that wither,
The old loves with wearier wings;
And all dead years draw thither,
And all disastrous things;
Dead dreams of days forsaken,
Blind buds that snows have shaken,

Wild leaves that winds have taken,
Red strays of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure;
To-day will die to-morrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light:

Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal
Nor days nor things diurnal,
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night."

In his later work the theme of passion was less brilliantly treated than in these first poems, and few of the passages in which he reverts to the subject are so significant, characteristic or successful. Passion as an element in human life attracted him rather in more dramatic ways, as it exists in the great trilogy of Queen Mary felt in diverse modes by those about the Queen from the tender and noble figure of Chastelard to the weakness of Darnley and the strength of Bothwell; or it at-

tracted him as the life-element of the myth of Tristram and Iseult, that in which they had the perfection of their being and the completion of their fate. In both cases this is the drama of passion, not its lyricism; and in both cases, too, it is divorced from the after-sickliness of thought that attends it in the youthful poems, and is free from the envelopment of the pagan world, from dead gods and past time; it stands by itself, in its own right, a part of nature and life universal, a reality. No English poem surpasses "Tristram of Lyonesse" in the quality of passion; it is great as a representation of passion, primarily, and equal to the fame of its theme. Yet it is rather upon the younger verse, in the early passionate efflorescence of his

poetic nature, that the fame of Swinburne as an original, unique and powerful exponent of the passion of life in the ways of desire, brilliantly illustrating the multiform romantic spirit, must rest.

VI

The meditative power of Swinburne's mind gradually displaced the passionate impulse of the senses, in his verse. He is a very thoughtful poet. The intellectual burden of his poetry first appeared in the vigour with which he seized and held to the idea of fate; fate is as elemental in his work as passion and is its true complement. The conception at the beginning may have been only a part of his Greek legacy, made familiar to him in his study

of Greek drama and adopted from it into his own literary scheme of art and philosophy of life. In "Atalanta of Calydon", fate is set forth in the choruses; it is associated there with the feeling of bitter hostility to the gods. There is a Lucretian sternness and fierceness in all of Swinburne's invective against those aspects of religion which were to him what superstition was to the old Roman; and he uses violence of phrase in the expression of his mood. It is thus that he comes to a climax of thought in the attack on the supernal powers which ends in the words, "the supreme evil, God." The thought is arrived at through the spectacle of the suffering of the human race, and applies, as it were, to the Zeus of Prometheus.

" Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men;
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears;
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again;
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes
and ears.
Therefore because thou art strong, our father, and we
Feeble ; and thou art against us, and thine hand
Constrains us in the shallows of the sea
And breaks us at the limits of the land ;
Because thou hast bent thy lightnings as a bow,
And loosed the hours like arrows ; and let fall
Sins and wild words and many a wingèd woe
And wars among us, and one end of all ;
Because thou hast made the thunder, and thy feet
Are as a rushing water when the skies
Break, and thy face as an exceeding heat
And flames of fire the eyelids of thine eyes ;
Because thou art over all who are over us ;
Because thy name is life and our name death ;
Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth ;

Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,
Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,
At least we witness of thee ere we die
That these things are not otherwise, but thus ;
That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,
That all men even as I,
All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high."

In such passages, of which this was the earliest, the life-weariness that belongs to exhausted passion is extended over the whole of life, and the philosophy set forth is frankly atheistic. The passing away of the successive hierarchies of gods that have been exalted in the heavens, including the entire symbolism of Christianity, is as constant a theme of Swinburne's imagination and meditation as is the transi-

toriness of the generations of men and their works; nor is there only this denial of the gods, but with it goes that implacable hostility to them and their ways, which has been alluded to, giving often to the verse an edge of scorn and hate. Swinburne derived from Greek literature the point of view, so far as the history of man under the Olympian dispensation was concerned; he derived from the revolutionary poets an attitude toward historical Christianity in its mediæval forms and in its institutional power, which was a practical repetition of the same point of view; however he approached supernatural religion he collided with the eternal mystery of God's dealing with mankind, and also with the temporal dis-

pensation of the professional ministers of God, the priesthood wherever found. The anti-Christian verse is, of course, incidental to and a part of the great mass of revolutionary verse, and belongs to the poet's crusade against the social powers that be, to his ranking himself with the spirit of Burns and the later upholders of the powers of light, that is of human intellect, liberty and love. But, besides this aspect of it, there is a philosophical side to his thought, apart from its revolutionary intention, by virtue of which it must be regarded abstractly as his own poetic attitude to the mystery of life itself. Fate is the simplest word to describe the power in whose dark and infinite grasp Swinburne habitually sees the universe of man.

Deeply impressed as the poet is by the conception of fate in life and in the universe, he does not embody it in either his dramas or his dramatic narrative with great power; he rather describes it than presents its operation; it is a presence rather than a force in his verse. The story of Atalanta, and also that of Erechtheus contain fate, in piteous and cruel forms, but the will of the gods in either case seems arbitrary rather than fatal. In the Trilogy of Queen Mary the element of fate is discernible in the constant reminiscence, though the play, of Chastelard's execution and in Mary Beaton who is the embodiment of that memory and shall remain with the Queen until the latter's death at the block expiates the original

wrong, or at least crowns it as a consummation; but the linking of fate which should connect one with the other directly and impressively, and as a law of necessity is not shown. In the other dramas there is a similar laxity in the causal operation of fate,— the fatal necessity of the action is not felt as power, but is described as story. In "Tristram of Lyonesse," it is the passion, not the fate of the lovers' love that is in the foreground of interest. In the shorter poems the method of presenting the general subject-matter is more abstract and by means of passages of invective. "Anactoria" is the best example, where the outcry against the divine power is repeatedly raised, with a fierce vindictiveness:

"Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
Threaten and trample all things and every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst
Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed
The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,
Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
And mix his immortality with death."

At the conclusion of this poem is the first expression of any possible human victory in the strife with the gods. It takes form in the thought that, whatever misfortune may be visited upon Sappho in life, yet after death she will have an immortality in

her words still breathing on the lips of men:

"Albeit I die indeed
And hide myself and sleep and no man heed,
Of me the high God hath not all his will.
Blossom of branches, and on each high hill
Clear air and wind, and under in clamorous vales
Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales,
Buds burning in the sudden spring like fire,
The wan washed sand and the waves' vain desire,
Sails seen like blown white flowers at sea, and words
That bring tears swiftest, and long notes of birds
Violently singing till the whole world sings —
I Sappho, shall be one with all these things,
With all high things for ever; and my face
Seen once, my songs once heard in a strange place,
Cleave to men's lives, and waste the days thereof
With gladness and much sadness and long love."

This hope of immortality in the mind and for the service of man is the prelude to

Swinburne's later exposition of man's faith in himself.

The earlier attitude of hostility to the gods yields in the poet's maturer years to a prevailing mood of high-spirited indifference, which is felt rather toward fate under the forms of the imagery of nature than under those of divine beings. The passage which best concentrates it is the speech of Tristram, concerning fate which is described only by negatives as the unknown infinite in the universe:

"*How should it turn from its great way to give*
Man that must die a clearer space to live?
Why should the waters of the sea be cleft,
The hills be molten to his right and left,
That he from deep to deep might pass dry-shod
Or look between the viewless heights on God?
Hath he such eyes as, when the shadows flee,

The sun looks out with to salute the sea?
Is his hand bounteous as the morning's hand?
Or where the night stands hath he feet to stand?
Will the storm cry not when he bids it cease?
Is it his voice that saith to the east wind, Peace?
Is his breath mightier than the west wind's breath?
Doth his heart know the things of life and death?
Can his face bring forth sunshine and give rain,
Or his weak will that dies and lives again
Make one thing certain or bind one thing fast,
That, as he willed, it shall be at the last?
How should the storms of heaven and kindled lights
And all the depths of things and topless heights
And air and earth and fire and water change
Their likeness, and the natural world grow strange,
And all the limits of their life undone
Lose count of time and conscience of the sun,
And that fall under which was fixed above,
That man might have a larger hour for love?"

It is in this identification of fate with the universe of greater being, in a form of apprehension which hovers between pantheism in its aspect of nature-force and in its aspect of humanity, that Swinburne's mind rests in its final meditation. The hymn entitled "Hertha" sets forth the matter in full and at great length, with a principal dependence in the imagery on Igdrasil, the tree of life. In its main philosophic intention the poem is hardly to be distinguished from Emerson's "Brahma", which is the type of such poetic thought; but Swinburne gives it a new turn and transforms its meaning by grafting into it the idea that mankind is the highest personification of the divine known to man and hence that true worship and religion

is in the energy of man's self-expression, in the apotheosis of himself that is self-achieved. The key stanza is this:

"A creed is a rod,
And a crown is of night;
But this thing is God,
To be man with thy might,
To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as the light."

The poem in its last line makes the identification of man with the infinite spirit plain:

"Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I."

The same doctrine is more elaborately stated and with a more comprehensive inclusion of many past elements of Swinburne's thought, especially with relation to the passing away of the gods and to the

history of superstition, in the "Hymn of Man," which Swinburne himself describes as "the birth-song of spiritual renascence" and which concludes its Miriam-like outburst of triumph over the fall of old religion with the exultant cry :

"*Glory to man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.*"

This is the French apotheosis of Reason in its most modern form, and may be regarded, perhaps, as essentially a hymn of positivism.

It thus appears that Swinburne's mind, guided by the preconceptions of his Greek studies and the revolutionary impetus of his native genius, has been deeply concerned with reaching an intellectual faith

with regard to the scheme of man's life as it has been seen by him in history. In this attempt he has clung most tenaciously to the idea of fate, a vague conception diversely seized by his mind and set forth in a variety of ways. The denial of the gods was inherent in his intellectual position; and the gods having passed away, there remained only such an adjustment of mind to the world emptied of old divinity as is possible to many a modern brooder over thought besides the poet himself who may be, somewhat at least, a type of such sceptical men. On the one hand there was the resource of the conception of the unknown infinite which is approached by human thought most commonly through the majestic phenomena of nature, and of

which the nature-poetry of the book of Job, whence come the imaginative method and scriptural cadences of that speech of Tristram that has been quoted, is the ritual of expression. On the other hand there was the resource of positivistic and humanitarian insistence on the religion of Humanity, the creed of doing as the other is the creed of knowing. The apotheosis of human energy is natural in any greatly progressive or violently active age of the world; and in the nineteenth century, with its unmeasured pride in itself and its incontestable greatness of achievement in both the realms of knowledge and action, faith in man sprang up and has flourished as if it were the ancient Igdrasil itself; it has seemed as if man were a god of nature

and a providence for the future, — at least that has been the tendency of man's late ideals in science and philanthropy. Man at least thinks himself — what Swinburne says the gods were not — piteous. Swinburne has caught the infection of both of these intellectual moods; he has on one hand accepted imaginatively the theory of the unknown natural infinite and on the other the doctrine of the greatness — as he frankly says, the godhead — of man; not, it should be observed, of men in their parcelled and particular individuality, but of the race, — the apotheosis is a thing of collectivity, and without such collectivity would not exist. Perhaps his own words should be given:

"*We men, the multiform features of man, whatsoever we be*

Recreate him of whom we are creatures, and all we
only are he.
For each man of all men is God, but God is the
fruit of the whole;
Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible body
from soul.
Not men's but man's is the glory of godhead,—"

In working out this side of the theory, it follows of necessity that the poet should find himself in a midmost ethical stream, that he should end less as a philosopher than as a moralist; he would finally be absorbed in the vindication of that law of life which is humanly discerned and applied as the will of "righteousness" from age to age. The gods pass like leaves of the forest, in their generations, even as men do; but righteousness is an abiding thing. It is this that is stated, very nobly and

magnificently indeed, in the chief poem of Swinburne's later years, "The Altar of Righteousness." This poem is the climax of his intellectual attempt in solving the universe, or in reaching at least a working relation with respect to it; it is the ultimate conviction, the last word,— this of the majestic permanence of righteousness.

Does it seem singular to any that the poet of passion should be one with the poet of righteousness? There is really no discord in the case; the two elements, at least, never cross in the verse. A poet gives a representation of life, and the variety of his representation depends on the richness and complexity of his nature. Swinburne was endowed with power to render with unrivalled vividness, with brilliance of

word and melody of cadence the experience of man's life in passion; he was also endowed with intellectual curiosity and restlessness, with mental vigour, with irrepressible and inexhaustible sympathies with the public causes of mankind in political and religious social life, and he had thence his power to interest himself in the ideas that lie back of all life, in the philosophy of the divine element appearing in the history of the race and in its changes under the shaping of time from Greek to Christian, and so on to the last results of modern speculation. He expressed himself from year to year, according to the faith that was in him, and he reached in his maturity the clear position which needs no plainer definition than his own lines con-

tain. The original idea of adverse fate has faded in his mind, it would appear, to that of the immanence of the unknown in nature, indifferent and kindless to man, but not consciously cruel and deliberately scornful like the old gods; and this in turn yields to the prominence in his later thought of the essential necessity that mankind is under to know no god except his own spirit, to advance that spirit as the life of the race itself, and to find the conscious law of righteousness in its bosom age after age its only oracle and guide to destiny.

VII

The third great monochord of Swinburne's verse, after passion and fate, is nature. The poet's genius is one of singu-

lar directness, though the fact is masked and obscured by the conventionalized, curious and classically reminiscent character that so much of his work superficially bears. The same directness that appears in his dealing with the experience of passion, and with the theory of the divine element in the universe, marks also his treatment of nature. He is a nature-poet, but rather in the energetic than the æsthetic sense. The reminiscence of his boyhood upbringing by the seas of the Northumberland coast and of the Isle of Wight is always present in his verse of every kind. His description is not deficient in either abundance or beauty of detail; but he seizes the landscape mainly as a whole, he feels the forces abiding in it as

power, he is exalted by its effluence in him as an emotion; in a word, his treatment is ample. Here, too, that extraordinary trait of primitiveness, that love of the primordial things in thought and life, of which much illustration has already been afforded in the preceding pages, breaks out with great force. It seems often that his mind is absorbed, not so much in natural objects in their individuality as in natural elements, in their larger life of the constitution, the whirl, the vast spectacle of nature. Fire, air, earth and water are the four elements from which his very vocabulary seems made up; flame, wind and foam, and all the forms of light are so much a part of his colour-rhythm that they become an opaline of verse peculiarly his

own; his mannerism in diction and style is chiefly a thing of his fascination with these elemental phases of matter and sensation which are more abstractions of motion, hue and luminousness than simple objects of sight and hearing. The blurring effect of this mass of indefinable sensation, especially when metaphorically employed, even more than the overcharge of vocal sound in the verse, accounts for that impression of vacuity of meaning that Swinburne's poetry in general makes on readers not habituated to his manner. The main fact is that in the sphere of natural imagery his mind tends constantly to escape from the limited and particular object into the more abstract primary elements of nature, and to use these meta-

phorically without definition to colour his verse with sensation that is rather emotional than perceptive; it is thus that he produces these effects by virtue of which his poetry is generally thought to have more affinity with the art of music than has been achieved by other poets. Colour-tones of nature have as much to do with this as simple sound-tones of rhyme, alliteration and cadence; all the senses, and not the ear alone, are occupied with this music which lulls and dazzles the mind with a magical and exquisite pleasure.

The nature poems of Swinburne in the precise sense, however, are many and various and among them some rise higher than others. He has himself, in his own review of his poetic work, named those which

to himself seem most significant, and his own choice coincides with that of his readers. He dwells there upon his closeness to the scene and repeats the same traits of the general landscape that he has described in verse. No summary can equal this in justice, brevity and breadth. The poems he selects are the four poems of the West Undercliff, "In the Bay," "On the Cliffs," "A Forsaken Garden," the dedication to "The Sisters," "Off Shore," "An Autumn Vision," "A Swimmer's Dream," "On the South Coast," "Neap-Tide." It will be found on examination that primitive nature is at the heart of all of these poems as plainly as it is in the last class he names — "such as try to render the effect of inland or woodland solitude —

the splendid oppression of nature at noon which found utterance of old in words of such singular and everlasting significance as panic and nympholepsy." The terror of noon is precisely one of those primordial things the fascination of which — not to speak of the wonder of his merely knowing it — stamps Swinburne's genius, in its approach to nature, with the aboriginal mark of the race. With this capacity to feel the old mood belongs the general largeness of his outlook and horizon, and through both these traits he comes into sympathy with polytheistic habitudes; at that moment of noon his genius hovers between the Sun-god in heaven and Pan on earth with an equal possession of mythologizing mind; and, in general, it is the grand features

and glomeration of things that holds him — heaven with all its stars, its winds and clouds; earth in great tracts of barren places or of "cliff and crag, lawn and woodland, garden and lea;" and most of all the sea.

Swinburne's ocean-poetry is the crown of his nature verse; in it he is not only most exalted and fluent and vivid, but he winds the sea-voices truly into his song. He was the child of a sailor-race, and in his boyhood the sea was his open highway of dream, imagination and sentiment, of the vision that comes to great poets in their youth. It was the thing of nature most clung about by his spirit; the sun — so he represents it — had his adoration, but the sea his love. The sea, too, had

other imaginative values to him. It was his nature-symbol of England. The thought of England as the oceanic power was natural ever after the Armada and the Elizabethan poets, and in later days is supported by the imperial dominion spread and based in all directions upon the waters; to Swinburne, the singer of the Armada and the patriot for whom the greatness of England lay in that quality of race of which her sea greatness is the memorial in time, England is, as it were, the emanation of the sea in humanity, one thing with it and, one may say, the spiritual form of it; so it seems to his eyes. The sea, too, is his nature-symbol of liberty, of that in the spirit of all mankind which is the greatest object of human effort, the condition and

the consummation of greatness in nations or men, the state of being in which alone they truly are at all. The historic association of liberty with the sea-races, from Athens down, helps in this idealization, which, in itself is natural to the thoughts of all men and universal in poetry. And again, through the operation of his own poetizing revery and fancy and the familiar growth of his spirit in conjunction with and through an environment of sea-experience, the sea became in Swinburne's secret thoughts the nature-symbol of his own genius, a thing of untameable and primitive nature blending with the cause of liberty and the glory of England and the universal hope and life of mankind; he thought of himself, mythically, as the

child of the sea, and he repeatedly praises a sea-death as the appropriate end of such a child.

This fancy, which is more genuine in feeling than might seem possible, is expressed in many passages of his poems, but it is the formative idea in one distinctive poem, which may fairly be regarded as an autobiographical myth of the idealizing sort, such as Shelley's "Epipsychidion," that entitled "Thalassius." It is a delicate and highly-finished work, and is also perhaps the most broadly instructive, the most comprehensive of his experience and theory, of any of his poems. Thalassius is the child of the Sea and of the Sun, and the verse relates his history from birth to the moment of his perfecting in

life, under the symbolism of classical mythic imagery. He is educated by a foster-father, and fed.

"*For bread with wisdom and with song for wine,*"

after the antique manner familiar to us in Shelley's verse of Laon and Prince Athanase; the identification with the poet is made plain in the details of this instruction:

"*High things the high song taught him;*

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

How he that loves life overmuch shall die
The dog's death, utterly:
And he that much less loves it than he hates
All wrongdoing that is done
Anywhere always underneath the sun
Shall live a mightier life than time's or fate's.

One fairer thing he shewed him, and in might
More strong than day and night
Whose strengths build up time's towering period :
Yea, one thing stronger and more high than God,
Which if man had not, then should God not be :
And that was Liberty.
And gladly should man die to gain, he said,
Freedom ; and gladlier, having lost, lie dead.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

And hate the song too taught him : hate of all
That brings or holds in thrall
Of spirit or flesh, free-born ere God began,
The holy body and sacred soul of man.
And wheresoever a curse was or a chain,
A throne for torment or a crown for bane
Rose, moulded out of poor men's molten pain,
There, said he, should man's heaviest hate be set
Inexorably, to faint not or forget
Till the last warmth bled forth of the last vein
In flesh that none should call a king's again,

Seeing wolves and dogs and birds that plague-
strike air
Leave the last bone of all the carrion bare.

And hope the high song taught him : hope whose
eyes
Can sound the seas unsoundable, the skies
Inaccessible of eyesight ; that can see
What earth beholds not, hear what wind and sea
Hear not, and speak what all these crying in one
Can speak not to the sun.
For in her sovereign eyelight all things are
Clear as the closest seen and kindlier star
That marries morn and even and winter and spring
With one love's golden ring.
For she can see the days of man, the birth
Of good and death of evil things on earth
Inevitable and infinite, and sure
As present pain is, or herself is pure.
Yea, she can hear and see, beyond all things
That lighten from before Time's thunderous wings

Through the awful circle of wheel-winged periods,
The tempest of the twilight of all Gods :
And higher than all the circling course they ran
The sundawn of the spirit that was man."

The body of the poem continues with the life experience of the hero, and at the end, at the moment of his perfecting, the Sun-god blesses him with words that may be taken as the ideal of the poet's life:

" Child of my sunlight and the sea, from birth
A fosterling and fugitive on earth ;
Sleepless of soul as wind or wave or fire,
A manchild with an ungrown God's desire ;
Because thou hast loved nought mortal more than me,
Thy father, and thy mother-hearted sea ;
Because thou hast set thine heart to sing, and sold
Life and life's love for song, God's living gold ;
Because thou hast given thy flower and fire of
youth

To feed men's hearts with visions, truer than truth ;
Because thou hast kept in those world-wandering
eyes
The light that makes me music of the skies ;
Because thou hast heard with world-unwearied ears
The music that puts light into the spheres ;
Have therefore in thine heart and in thy mouth
The sound of song that mingles north and south,
The song of all the winds that sing of me,
And in thy soul the sense of all the sea."

In this poem the nature-poetry of Swinburne finds its highest and most beautiful idealization in human life; it is, in fact, the crowning work of his hand, in so far as he drew his inspiration from the life of his spirit with nature.

Admirable in portraiture as the pure nature-poems of Swinburne are, in their mere rendering of scene, atmosphere and

landscape mood, they gain in poetic power in proportion as the element of human life is brought into them in any form, whether as a personal tone of the poet or as incident, memory or vision, or as a main action. In "Thalassius," the idealization of nature is superfine and places the poem in the highest rank of those few imaginative and spiritualized allegories of life which can appeal deeply only to a narrow circle of readers in any generation, men who are numbered by two's and three's rather than by scores. In numerous poems, however, Swinburne has blended description with autobiography in the most charming way, especially in those coast poems which he has associated with the name of his friend, Theodore Watts-Dunton, himself

a nature-lover with the primitive bases of feeling in him belonging to earlier ages and a more earthly generation of men; and also, and peculiarly, in the poems of swimming the blend of nature with life is accomplished with a fine effect. The great instance of such a description in which nature is not only the scene but the giver of the action is the swim of Tristram in the dawn of the Sun just before the battle in which he receives his death-wounds. The passage is long, and fuller of pure natural beauty than any other scene in the poet's verse, and it is besides unique in literature, sole by itself in its saturation with the sea and the dawn and the joy of the swimmer, made one joy of all; but no presentation of Swinburne's nature-

verse can spare the concluding lines, with the glory of their physical delight:

" Till the sweet change that bids the sense grow sure
Of deeper depth and purity more pure
Wrapped him and lapped him round with clearer cold,
And all the rippling green grew royal gold
Between him and the far sun's rising rim.
And like the sun his heart rejoiced in him,
And brightened with a broadening flame of mirth ;
And hardly seemed its life a part of earth,
But the life kindled of a fiery birth
And passion of a new-begotten son
Between the live sea and the living sun.
And mightier grew the joy to meet full-faced
Each wave, and mount with upward plunge, and taste
The rapture of its rolling strength, and cross
Its flickering crown of snows that flash and toss
Like plumes in battles' blithest charge, and thence

To watch the next with yet more strenuous sense ;
Till on his eyes the light beat hard and bade
His face turn west and shoreward through the glad
Swift revel of the waters golden-clad
And back with light reluctant heart he bore
Across the broad-backed rollers in to shore."

Such poetry brings back that early world in which old Triton blew his wreathed horn, and not in a vision only, but as the everlasting life of nature and man.

Swinburne is at heart a nature-worshipper, and it is through the symbolism of nature that his religious instincts find their fullest and unimpeded flow. His classically reminiscent and anti-Christian poems alike contain a literary alloy and belong in substance to scholarship, to progress, to things of civilization, to so-

ciety; in proportion as he lays these things aside and reverts in primitive freedom to the world of nature, to awe of the sun and delight in the waves and indefinable moods of the moors, the barrens and the glens, he recaptures the original soul, becomes himself purely, pours out his spirit directly, intensely, overflowingly, — he lives the poetic life. The deepest sympathies of his genius are with force, with things of power everywhere, with the energies of life. The truth about him is the exact opposite of what has been widely and popularly thought; weakness, affectation, exotic foreignness, the traits of æstheticism in the debased sense of that word, are far from him; he is strong, he is genuine, he is English, bred with an Eu-

ropean mind it is true like Shelley, like Gray and Milton, but in his own genius, temperament and the paths of his flight charged with the strength of England. In his nature-verse there is sympathy with power, grandeur, energy, marking the verse unmistakably as that of a strong soul; in his social verse of all kinds, political and religious, there is the same sympathy marking it, making it clarion-like, to use his own metaphor, for liberty, progress, man, for the truth and love of the Revolution, for the ideal of the Republic as the great and single aim of the race. In his passion-verse there is the same breath of the power of life; and that farewell to life in which the pagan mood ends, by its insistency, its poignancy, its plan-

gency, the sweetness of its regret, the bitterness of its despair, is the death-recoil of a great power of life, of joy and dream and aspiration in youth, of a power to seize the things of nature and of the spirit, to live over again the experience, to think over again the thoughts of man, to have man's life. It belonged to so strong a nature and genius that the larger note should be ever increasing in the song, blending in widening harmonies, to rest in the unities of nature, of man, and of man's hope in society.

VIII

Swinburne's nature poetry has the added charm of affording some access to his personality, since it is closely connected with his habits of life, his friendships and the

loved and familiar places where he has passed his years. Memory and companionship have a large share in their inspiration, and the trace of French and Italian travel and of holidays along English shores is a trodden trail in the verse. He will remain a figure of the Northumbrian headlands and the South Coast forever in the imaginative memory of literature; there he is seen in the verse, alone or with a friend, on horseback or a-foot or a-swim, in his habit as he lived in his own country and with a love for the soil and the breaking sea, his English birth. Such a background of personality, of the human life of a man, is deeply desired by a poet's lovers who thus reach an unnoticed share in his privacy; it is the craving and the due of

their gratitude and answers to his unknown intimacy with their own spirits. A finer approach, however, is given by Swinburne in the numerous poems which he has dedicated to childhood, all of an intimate personal tone, and revealing his heart and mood and speech in the gentlest part of household privacy, in his love of children. The verse, as is usual with him, has a monotone, the permanence and depth of an unchangeable emotion that wells always from the same spring; it is made up of pure affection, repeated over and over, of kin to a child's kisses, for which it calls, to which it answers and through which it exists, a delicate, intimate, worshipping poesy, of which the like in English is not to be found. There is here

the Delphic christening of the babe, one after another, the birthday ode to the boy faithful with each revolving year, the death-rite of the little life in sad cadences of brief refrains; and unique among even these records of life is that rosary of daily song which counts the month of absence and gives the weariness of the child-emptied house through the lengthening hours of summer bereft of its soul. To be capable of such a series shows the man's heart better than all else in his verse; and happy was the boy's head that drew this light to shine upon it and flash out the gold of the poet's affection like sunshine falling there in far absence, in memory, in presence as the two heads bent together over the legend and the picture by the fire. The

sense of the household is as intimate and private here as in Cowper's verse; the house and the garden and the hours are pure English; all is native to the soil, the flower-age, the home of England. In this verse the solitary and secluded figure of the scholarly poet is familiarly seen in the gentlest associations and the happiest acts of life.

The nature of Swinburne's personal life is also, though less plainly and unreservedly, shown in the large number of poems addressed to his companions, on one or another occasion, but naturally most of these are memorial verses. He has been "fortunate in friendships," and the hold of love in them was strong. The most of the friends to whom he dedicates verse are naturally in the group of artists

and men of letters with which his own fame is associated, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, William Bell Scott, Morris, Watts, Maddox-Brown, Watts-Dunton, and others, with whom he found his principal companionship in literary and artistic sympathy; but the list includes many besides these, distinguished or eminent or memorable for old association with Landor or Shelley or some other. A life which leaves so rich a personal memorial of its human loves, however secluded, has won for itself or received by its own grace one of the true felicities and happiest rewards found by man. Hardly less near than these attachments, the verse discloses the ties, as of student and master, with Landor, Hugo and Mazzini, which Swinburne re-

garded as the highest honour and greatest blessing upon his younger head; and in a degree yet further removed the verse continues to show, with an ever greater volume and widening range, his tribute to the dead masters of literature, not conventionally or perfunctorily or affectedly, but in a genuine and deeply-felt outpouring of admiration and gratitude and that strange, mighty love that only the dead can arouse, a thing of the pure and untrammelled soul. He was ever a lover of heroes, of great deeds and famous works; for him the heavens of fame were constellated more with poetic and spiritual names than is the case with other men; he was faithful to the pure fires there and saw the eternity of poetry as a flame outburning all others

in beauty and everlastingness; he worshipped in his verse poetry, freedom, truth, and the fames that are indestructible names of these in human memory. "On the Cliffs" is a poem in which there is both the vision and the rhapsody of this, in very noble and unusual imaginative forms, and stands as the type of his mood toward fame, which for him more truly than for men at large was what Shelley called it "love disguised." In all this volume of human appreciation, for the great fames of the past, for the elder masters who touched him with their hands, for the company of familiar friends in private life, there is to be observed the same strength of soul, the same affluence of response to life, the same capacity for the passion of

life in its largeness which has already been spoken of as the fundamental thing in the poet's nature, but here seen in its noblest phase as a power to love.

IX

Liberty, melody, passion, fate, nature, love and fame are the seven chords which the poet's hand, from its first almost boyhood touch upon the lyre, has swept now for two score years with music that has been blown through the world. He sang in the lines of his earliest dedication, in the opening lines of it,—

"*The sea gives her shells to the shingle,*
The earth gives her streams to the sea;
They are many, but my gift is single,
My verses, the first fruits of me."

and a certain singleness has abided in the gift to the end. He has been faithful to his early lights, his first loves, and has served the ideal of his life with an unswerving rectitude, a tireless industry and an unflinching courage. He has been the laureate of the Republic in Europe as the continental cause of liberty in every tyrannic or partially enfranchised land; he has been a national poet of England, and has besides enriched English literature with a music never heard before, with the most stately tragedies of his time,and with its most imaginative romantic poem of passion and with a multitude of noble single poems of great variety of theme, mood and art. He has supplemented this poetic gift with a large body of prose

which contains the wealth of a poet's appreciation of a main portion of the most famous English literature as well as of the greatest modern poetic mind of France,—a treasure of intuitive criticism such as no other English poet has left. This is the fruit of a long labour of life. Strength is dominant in his genius; the things of strength are in his verse; it is English genius and English strength, racial in lyric power, in free intellect, in bold speech,—none more so — and English also in its poetic scholarly tradition. The reversionary tendency of his art, the imaginative remoteness of his themes, the primitive predilection of his temperament have been pointed out, with the resulting detachment of his genius in important ways from his

own age and generation; but if a certain aloofness has come into his work from these causes, he has been thereby withdrawn into what is most primary in art and most elemental in nature and life. He has been genuine, as only high genius can be, in all that he has done. In private life he has lived in seclusion; but he has been one of a company of sympathetic friends, and has besides numbered among his companions many others of the men of distinction of his times. He has never failed in public sympathy with great occasions and events. As a poet, notwithstanding his genius and labour, it must be said he found the world inhospitable. The measure of praise that he won has gone no further than the acknowledgment of the

victory of a poetic power that could not be denied; it has not much increased with years; it has never been adequate, just or intelligent. There is, perhaps, the consciousness of this in the concluding words of his remarks on his collected verse, which he addresses to his friend and house-mate through these latter years: "It is nothing to me that what I write should find immediate or general acceptance; it is much to know that, on the whole, it has won for me the right to address this dedication and inscribe this edition to you." The poet, like all men of simple greatness, is free, it would seem, from the desire for applause, but not from the human want of some loving comradeship in his art. There are, in the wide

world, here and there a few — a number that will increase ever with passing generations and is even now perhaps manyfold greater than the poet knows — in whose hearts his poetry is lodged with power.

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